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GERMAN IN THE CLASS-ROOM.

MANY modern-language teachers maintain that it is a waste of time in the public school to teach the student to speak German or any other modern language, and to make this the language of the class-room; that the student after three or four years of the best instruction has little fluency in talking; and that much time, which might be spent in sound, scholarly instruction, is wasted. I grant that with the best instruction the student at the end of such a course is not a fluent conversationalist. Fluency is seldom gained away from the language's native country. But is fluency the only aim of making German the language of the class-room?

Several German classes that I have visited have been conducted in English, and in a very painstaking, thorough manner. After the student had read perhaps ten lines of the German text with no expression, and small regard for natural pauses, he was stopped and asked to translate. After the translation, which was kept as close to the original as possible, the instructor asked questions on syntax, derivation, and other grammatical points. The means became the end. Then perhaps, after the section had been picked to pieces, the teacher would remark that that was one of the most admired parts of Schiller. How the heart would be taken out of Schiller's *Jungfrau* by such a method! Still, in the opinion of many people, that was a very thorough, scholarly, well-conducted recitation. But what effect would such a recitation have on the student? In the first place, he does not know that he is reading German. He pronounces strange, harsh sounds, which are to him only made-over English. They mean nothing, except as he puts them into his labored class-room English. He cannot feel that those sounds form a medium of expression for any civilized being. Then the syntax, always unpopular with the pupil, full of the vagaries of the spoken language, takes his mind from the subject-matter, which yet is closely enough associated to receive much of the blame for the deadly dullness of the technical work. Has the German gained anything by it? Nothing, except that the pupil has attained some knowledge of the skeleton of the language,

with no flesh upon it—a repulsive object always. It is not the attractive, living creature that it should be. And the English? That has lost rather than gained, for the pigeon English used in such exact translation is very bad and affects the purity of the student's everyday language. Besides, the literary beauties of the book read are utterly lost. The characters in plays are greatly confused, and the story interest is often so entirely lacking that the book is a bore to the pupil and becomes to him typical of all German writings.

In contrast, consider the other method. From the time the class enters the room German is spoken, and with the more advanced classes little or no translation is done. The atmosphere of the room is German. With Schiller's plays, the parts are assigned to various students, and the reading is begun. The students in their different rôles answer one another and show readily by the voice expression whether they understand what they are reading. When the least vagueness of comprehension is shown by the voice, the teacher immediately asks for the English translation, in that way clearing up all difficulty and proving whether the pupil has made the due preparation. Also the English translation should be given for any especially difficult section. With these two exceptions, English need rarely be heard in the recitation. In the beginning classes the use of German as the class-room medium is necessarily gradual, but it is astonishing how soon English can be done away with even with them. What does the student gain from such a recitation? Does he talk German readily? Sometimes he talks fairly well, but never fluently. But, again, is fluency the only aim of conversation work? A minor aim, it seems to me; for the average pupil will have few occasions to use the language orally. The great object of such work is the gaining of *Sprachgefühl*, and the feeling that German is a living language, an instrument by which thoughts may be expressed. As the student reads the German word, he gets the thought without the intervention of the English. The people of Schiller's plays become to him very human and interesting. I am often surprised at the spirit and enthusiasm shown in the reading. The proper force and expression is given by the reader and felt by the class. By this method, interest in the whole book or play is greatly increased. Besides, the student begins unconsciously to think in German. I gave little attention to

technical points, points with which a spoken language has little to do, and which should be reserved for more advanced work. Moreover, the important thing in the spoken language is not to know what tense and mode must be used, but to be so familiar with the usage that the proper form is used without thought of the grammatical reason behind it. What I gave the most attention to was the literary side of our book, and the way it showed up the Germans and their ways. Knowledge of the language comes from familiar usage, and is gained more by absorption than by the actual mastery of facts. Several times, in asking for the translation of a sentence expressed in a markedly German way, my brightest pupils would tell me that the meaning was perfectly clear to them, but they could find no English that was adequate. There a point was gained, when the student recognized the adequacy of the German expression, but its utter dissimilarity to any English expression. Of course, I insisted upon a translation, and got often a very free one, which yet contained the spirit of the original. I also used to demand the literal translation, so that the student would not lose sight of the idiomatic construction.

I realize that the method I advocate may be attacked on the charge of inexactness, of vagueness. But is the spoken language exact? Is it consciously governed by rules? The laws of syntax do not have the same weight here as with dead languages, which are subject to no changes. But I gained exactness in other ways. One day a week was set aside for prose work, and then English was used in the class-room, whenever it was necessary to make constructions clear. I found it better both for the prose work and for the reading to have them entirely separate. The mind could thus be kept to the one line of work without the confusing interruption of the other. Then the *erzählen* work, or work in narration, helped both lines of work. I would assign an act or a chapter, the contents of which was to be given orally in German in the pupil's own words. This was a sort of informal prose, but was also a part of the work to gain *Sprachgefühl*. To gain this feeling of the German as a living language, the memorizing of poems, as is generally practiced, is also a great help.

I think it is very clear which method would be pleasing to the

student—a very important point, for half the battle is won when the recitation is of interest and genuinely liked. Some of my German classes were a great pleasure to me, and also, I think, to my students. They considered the class-room work great fun and were encouraged by the consciousness of their own ability. They became so interested in the books studied that they oftentimes read beyond the lesson assigned. One Christmas vacation we lacked about forty pages of finishing Schiller's *Jungfrau*, which we left at a very interesting point. When I took up the class again after the New Year, I found, much to my surprise, that every member of that class, without any suggestion from me, had finished the book.

If interest, *Sprachgefühl*, ability to think in German, an easy familiarity with German expressions, and a feeling that other languages are expressive as well as English, are gained, we need not feel that our time is wasted if our pupils do not speak glibly. They all speak somewhat and, when once brought in contact with German-speaking people, will soon talk fluently. These results gained are intangible, and therefore difficult to put on paper; but here, as with many things, the intangible is the most important.

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